

Assisting Constituents in the 7th Congressional District

Mike Ferguson

Conservation Technical Assistance

Application for RC&D Program

NRCS staff assisted the Urban Conservation Action Partnership (UCAP) Board of Directors in preparation of the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) application for Bergen, Essex, Hudson, and Passaic counties. The region is the last area in New Jersey to seek RC&D Council status. Approval by the Secretary of Agriculture would increase NRCS assistance in areas such as community development, urban-rural interface, greenway and open space preservation, urban natural resource conservation, and outreach to the residents, who number more than 2 million, in the region.

Plantings Improve Water Quality in the Rahway River Watershed

Water quality in the Rahway River Watershed was further improved through the use of native vegetation plantings in Cranford. In September 2001, volunteers continued renovation of a small under-utilized park in Cranford that previously had only non-native shrubs and trees planted. Invasive weeds along the bank were removed and native shrubs planted that will filter runoff and attract more diverse songbirds to the park. In Westfield, the riparian buffers planted in Mindowaskin Park have been regularly monitored by Westfield Township staff and continue to thrive. Continued feeding of geese by a few local residents is a problem yet to be overcome.

Brightwood Park, Westfield to Develop New Trails

The town of Westfield, the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District, and NRCS will work together to expand a natural resources trail system in the Brightwood Park in Westfield. The park was approved to receive a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Recreational Trails Grant of \$20,000. The project will highlight the diverse habitats present at the site, with three new trail loops to be built through the woods from the existing lake trail. The wetlands and old cultural features found in the park will be included. Trail work and native species plantings fieldwork are scheduled to begin in spring 2002.

Conservation Education and Outreach

All members of the New Jersey Conservation Partnership are actively engaged in public education and outreach. Conservation education and direct assistance to the public are ongoing priorities in your Congressional District and throughout the state.

Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention

Millstone River Watershed PL83-566 Project

Since January 2000, NRCS has been working with a locally-led Steering Committee to address various problems in the Millstone River Watershed in central New Jersey. The committee is made up of representatives of five counties, four Soil Conservation Districts, NJ Water Supply Authority, DEP, FEMA, and numerous municipalities. The Steering Committee has identified several objectives that it hopes to address through the NRCS Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL83-566). These objectives include flood damage mitigation, water-based recreation development, water quality protection/improvement, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, agricultural land preservation, and agricultural land preservation.

NRCS conducted interviews with local municipal officials and analyzed FEMA National Flood Insurance Program Claims data to develop a flood damage area prioritization map. The Millstone River Steering Committee used this information to prioritize the flood damage areas where further study is needed.

NRCS is gathering information on water turbidity in the Millstone River Watershed. Specifically being addressed is its effect on additional costs incurred by drinking water suppliers that serve North Brunswick Township and the Central New Jersey vicinity. This information will be used to determine what type of cost-effective measures can be taken to reduce these problems.

The committee anticipates completing the watershed plan by late 2002. Further information on the project is available at: http://www.raritanbasin.org/nrcs_millstone.htm.

Conservation Programs

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) in Schools

Four school sites in District 7 are using the WHIP program to create wildlife habitat areas. William Woodruff School has implemented over 72% of their WHIP conservation plan and contract. The project allows hundreds of school children to interact with native plants in a new and unique way – by having an active role in their selection, planting, and care. In 1998, Hillside School in District 7 entered into a WHIP contract. They went right to work and installed a butterfly garden. They also created a buffer alongside an existing ditch. A shallow wildlife watering facility with a buffer was added several years later to complete the contract.

Soil Erosion and Stormwater Control Provided in Developing Areas

The NJ Conservation Partnership helps growing communities protect their soil resources from erosion. Through the State Soil Conservation Committee's erosion and sediment control regulatory program, the Soil Conservation Districts serving District 7 review and certify proposed development plans for soil erosion control before and after construction. They also review plans for stormwater control and issue permits. Local inspectors check compliance to ensure natural resource conservation on development sites.

For more information about these and other conservation issues in the 7th District, contact the Freehold SCD: (732) 446-2300; Hudson-Essex-Passaic SCD: (973) 364-0786; Somerset-Union SCD: (908) 526-2701 or NRCS Frenchtown Service Center: (908) 782-4614; NRCS Freehold Service Center: (732) 462-1079; NRCS Morris Plains UCAP Service Center: (973) 538-1552. State level contacts are the SSCC: (609) 292-5540; NJACD: (973) 398-2511; NRCS: (732) 246-1171.